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## Mahā Sakya,muni Gotama Sutta

The Great Sakya Sage Gotama Discourse | S 12.10/2:10 f

Theme: How the Buddha awakened

Translated by Piya Tan, ©2005

[For a comparison of the Nagara Sutta, the Mahā Sakya,muni Gotama Sutta, the Sanskrit Nagara Sūtra, and their Chinese cognates. See the digital file, “14.4 Nagara S comparative studies.”]

### 1 Introduction

The Mahā Sakya,muni Gotama Sutta (S 12.10)<sup>1</sup> is the last of a series of seven suttas (S 12.4-10),<sup>2</sup> dealing in identical terms, the awakening of the past six Buddhas and our own Buddha Gotama as that of the discovery of dependent arising and its ending. The Gotama Sutta, the Nagara Sutta (S 12.65) and the Nagara Sūtra (in Sanskrit), similarly recount the same key event in Buddhist spirituality: the nature of the Buddha’s awakening. They recount how the Buddha, when he was still a Bodhisattva (a Buddha-to-be) noticed the sufferings of the world, and how he discovered the way out of this suffering. This discovery of awakening is related by way of the two modes of dependent arising (*paṭicca,samuppāda*), first in the forward mode (*anuloma*) showing how decay, death, birth and repeated suffering arise, and then in the reverse mode (*paṭiloma*) showing how they end.

All these suttas deal with the nature of the arising and the ending of suffering. They all begin by investigating the condition for the arising of decay-and-death: the (Sanskrit) Nagara Sūtra [§54a], the Nagara Sutta [§3] and the Mahā Sakya,muni Gotama Sutta [§3.1]. The Nagara Sūtra and the the Mahā Sakya,muni Gotama Sutta, except for their language (the former is in Sanskrit, the latter Pali), both identically give the traditional 12-link dependent arising formula, beginning with ignorance (*āviijā*) and ending with suffering (*soka,parideva,dukkha...*). The main difference here is that the Nagara Sūtra, like the Nagara Sutta has the city parable, while the Mahā Sakya,muni Gotama Sutta does not.

Like the Nagara Sutta, the Gotama Sutta is a classic statement on Buddhist spirituality being a path (*magga*) [§§19-22.1], that is, a way or method of personal development culminating in self-awakening. Towards the end of the sutta, in the parable section, the Buddha declares that this path is none other than the noble eightfold path (*ariy’atṭhaṅgika magga*), a path travelled in triple-gear vehicle, that is, one equipped with moral virtue (*sīla*), mental concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*paññā*).<sup>3</sup>

### 2 Wise attention

The Commentaries consistently gloss “wise attention” (*yoniso manasikāra*) [3.2 etc] as “attention to the means, attention to the right course” (*upāya,manasikāra, patha,manasikāra*), meaning attention by way of right means and right course. The first passage in **the Nivaraṇa Pahāna Vagga** (A 1.2.1) says:

Bhikshus, I see no other single truth on account of which unarisen sensual lust arises, and arisen sensual lust increases and grows abundant as this, bhikshus, namely, a beautiful object (*subha,nimitta*).

Bhikshus, for one who unwisely attends to a beautiful object, unarisen sensual lust arises, and arisen sensual lust increases and grows abundant. (A 1.2.1/1:3)

The Aṅguttara Commentary here quotes **the Vibhaṅga** definition of unwise attention (*ayoniso,manasikāra*), thus:

Therein, what is “unwise attention”?

<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, “Gotama Sutta” in brief.

<sup>2</sup> S 12.4-10/2:5-11.

<sup>3</sup> A whole chapter in **Saṃyutta Nikāya**—the Magga Saṃyutta or connected discourses on the path—deals with this aspect. See **Nagara S** (S 12.65) = SD 14.2 Introd (1).

“In the impermanent, there is permanence” is unwise attention.

“In the painful, there is pleasure” is unwise attention.

“In what is not self, there is a self” is unwise attention.

“In what is foul, there is beauty” is unwise attention.

Or, turning the mind, repeated turning, intentness, advertence, attention to what is contrary to the truth. This is called unwise attention. (Vbh §936/373)

The Vibhaṅga then goes on to define “the wrong path” (*kummaggo*) as not keeping to the noble eightfold path. In fact, unwise attention is the cause of all the five mental hindrances (*pañca, nīvaranā*)<sup>4</sup> to mental focus and health.

The line *There was in me penetration into wisdom* (*ahu paññāya abhisamayo*) [3.2 etc], connected with wise attention, is explained by the Saṃyutta Commentary on **the Vipassi Sutta** (S 2:5)<sup>5</sup> as follows:

*There was in me penetration into wisdom (ahu paññāya abhisamayo)*. There was a breakthrough, a concurrence, a conjunction of the reason for decay-and-death together with wisdom (*paññāya saddhīm jarā, maraṇa, kāraṇassa abhisamayo samavāyo samāyogo ahoṣi*); the meaning is that it was seen by him, “With birth as condition, there is decay-and-death.”

Or, alternatively, *Through wise attention, there was...in wisdom* (*yoniso manasikārā ahu paññāyā ti*), that is, through wise attention and wisdom there was a breakthrough (*yoniso manasikārena ca paññāya ca abhisamayo ahu*). The meaning is that the penetration of decay-and-death occurs thus, “When there is birth, there is decay-and-death.” (SA 2:21)

In a note to his Gotama Sutta translation, **Bodhi** helpfully clarifies:

The first of these explanations is improbable, and even the second is unsatisfactory in construing careful attention [*yoniso manasikāra*] and wisdom as joint causes. In general sutta usage *yoniso manasikāra* is the forerunner of *paññā*, while *paññā* is the efficient cause of *abhisamaya*. As a technical term, *abhisamaya* appears in the Nikāyas in two main contexts:

(i) as signifying the initial breakthrough to the Dhamma, *dhammābhisamaya*, it is identical with the obtaining of the vision of the Dhamma (*dhamma, cakkhu, paṭilābha*), and thus with the attainment of stream-entry.<sup>6</sup>

(ii) As signifying the complete breaking through of conceit (*sammā mānābhisamaya*) it is equivalent to the attainment of arahantship.<sup>7</sup>

A third sutta use is to denote the Buddha’s discovery of the Dhamma, as here and in the verb form *abhisameti* at [S 12.20].<sup>8</sup>

In the commentaries *abhisamaya* is synonymous with *paṭivedha*, penetration, both terms being used interchangeably to characterize the four functions of the supramundane path.<sup>9</sup>

(S:B 729 n13; refs normalized)

In **the Māra Pāsa Sutta 1** (S 4.4),<sup>10</sup> the Buddha declares that he attained supreme liberation through wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) and wise right effort (*yoniso samma-p, padhāna*). The way wise atten-

<sup>4</sup> Sensual lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restless and worry, and doubt. See (**Āhāra**) **Kāya S** (S 46.2/5:64-67), **Āhāra S** (S 46.51/5:102-107) = SD 7.15, and **Saṅgārava S** (S 46.55/5:121-126) = SD 3.12.

<sup>5</sup> S 12.4/2:5. This is the first of seven suttas (S 12.4-10), dealing in identical terms, the awakening of the past six Buddhas and our own Buddha Gotama. See above (1).

<sup>6</sup> See **the Nakha, sikhā S**, S 13.1/2:134,4-5.

<sup>7</sup> See the **Daṭṭhabbena S**, S 36.5/4:207,14-15 & the (Vaṅgīsam) **Ānanda Sutta**, S 1:v725c.

<sup>8</sup> See **Paccaya S**, S 12.20/2:25-27.

<sup>9</sup> See **Vism** 22.92-97/689-691.

<sup>10</sup> S 4.4/1:105.

tion works is shown in detail in **the Āhāra Sutta** (S 46.51),<sup>11</sup> where unwise attention is said to “feed” the mental hindrances and to “starve” the awakening factors; and where wise attention is said to “starve” the mental hindrances and to “feed” the awakening factors.” The four right efforts are expounded in **the (Magga) Vibhaṅga Sutta** (S 45.8)<sup>12</sup> and **the Gaṅga Sutta** (S 49.1).<sup>13</sup>

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## The Discourse on the Great Sakya Sage Gotama

S 12.65/2:104-107

[10]

1 [Thus have I heard. At one time, the Blessed One] was residing [in Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery in Jeta’s grove] near Sāvathī.

### Before the awakening

2.1 Bhikshus, before my self-awakening, when I was still a bodhisattva, it occurred to me:

2.2 ‘Alas! What difficulty this world has come to! One is born, and decays, and dies, and falls (from the heavens), and is reborn.’<sup>14</sup>

2.3 Furthermore, they know not the escape from this suffering, from decay-and-death.

2.4 Now when will an escape be known from this suffering of decay-and-death (and so on)?’

### Dependent arising of suffering

3.1 Bhikshus, then it occurred to me:

‘Now, when what is, does decay-and-death occur?’

What is the condition for decay-and-death?’

3.2 Then, bhikshus, through wise attention,<sup>15</sup> there was in me penetration into wisdom<sup>16</sup> thus:

‘When there is birth, decay-and-death occurs;

with birth as condition, there is decay-and-death.’

4.1 Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:

‘Now when what is, does birth occur?’

What is the condition for birth?’

4.2 Then, bhikshus, this through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:

‘When there is existence, birth occurs;

with existence as condition, there is birth.’

<sup>11</sup> S 46.51/5:102-107 = SD 7.15.

<sup>12</sup> S 45.8/5:8-10 = SD 14.5.

<sup>13</sup> S 49.1/5:244 (the Gaṅga Peyyāla).

<sup>14</sup> “Is reborn.” Be PTS Se *upapajjati*; Ce *uppajjati* always. While the former usu refers to rebirth, the latter has a general sense of birth: see CPD & DP.

<sup>15</sup> “Wise attention,” *yoniso manasikāra*, alt tr “skillful consideration.” See Intro (2) above.

<sup>16</sup> “Penetration into wisdom,” *paññāya abhisamāyo* (taking *paññāya* as loc), alt tr “penetration through wisdom” (taking *paññāya* as ins). See (3) above.

**5.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is, does existence occur?  
What is the condition for existence?’

**5.2** Then, bhikshus, this through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is clinging, existence occurs;  
with clinging as condition, there is existence.’

**6.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is, does clinging occur?  
What is the condition for clinging?’

**6.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is craving, clinging occurs;  
with craving as condition, there is existence.’

**7.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is, does craving occur?  
What is the condition for craving?’

**7.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is feeling, craving occurs;  
with feeling as condition, there is craving.’

**8.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is, does feeling occur?  
What is the condition for feeling?’

**8.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is contact, feeling occurs;  
with contact as condition, there is feeling.’

**9.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is, does contact occur?  
What is the condition for contact?’

**9.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is the sixfold sense-base, contact occurs;  
with the sixfold sense-base as condition, there is contact.’

**10.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is, does the sixfold sense-base occur?  
What is the condition for sixfold sense-base?’

**10.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into reality thus:  
‘When there is name-and-form, the sixfold sense-base occurs;  
with name-and-form as condition, there is the sixfold sense-base.’

**11.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is, does name-and-form occur?  
What is the condition for name-and-form?’

**11.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there is in me the penetration thus:  
‘When there are formations, consciousness occurs;  
with formations as condition, there is consciousness.’

**12.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is, does consciousness occur?’

What is the condition for consciousness?’<sup>17</sup>

**12.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there is in me the penetration thus:

‘When there are formations, consciousness occurs;  
with formations as condition, there is consciousness.’

**13.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:

‘Now when what is, does formations occur?’

What is the condition for formations?’

**13.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there arose in me penetration into reality thus:

‘When there is ignorance, formations occur;  
with ignorance as condition, there are formations.’

### The arising of suffering

**14** Thus there is this:

With ignorance as condition, there are formations.

With formations as condition, there is consciousness.

With consciousness as condition, there is name-and-form.

With name-and-form as condition, there is the sixfold sense-base.<sup>18</sup>

With the sixfold sense-base as condition, there is contact.

With contact as condition, there is feeling.

With feeling as condition, there is clinging.

With clinging as condition, there is craving.

With craving as condition, there is existence.

With existence as condition, there is birth.

With birth as condition, there is decay-and-death:

Sorrow, lamentation, mental pain, physical pain, and despair arise.

Thus there is the arising of this whole mass of suffering.

**15** ‘**The arising! The arising!**’ thus, bhikshus, it occurred to me. In things unheard before, the eye arose in me, knowledge arose, wisdom arose, true knowledge arose, light arose.

### Dependent ending of suffering

**16.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:

‘Now when what is not, does decay-and-death not occur?’

With the ending of what, is there the ending of decay-and-death?’

**16.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:

‘When there is no birth, decay-and-death does not occur;

With the ending of birth, there is the ending of decay-and-death.’

**17.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:

‘Now when what is not, **[11]** does birth not occur?’

With the ending of what, is there the ending of birth?’

**17.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:

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<sup>17</sup> Here, the concordance between this sutta and **Nagara S** (S 12.65) ends. The **Nagara S** (S 12.65 §9.1) continues: ‘Now this consciousness turns back. It goes no further than name-and-form.’ Then it takes a different approach, using the looped dependent arising formula. See SD 14.2 §9.1.

<sup>18</sup> Hereon, the concordance between this sutta and **Nagara S** (S 12.65 §9.3) resumes until §25.2 here, where **Nagara S** continue with the looped dependent ending of suffering.

‘When there is no existence, birth does not occur;  
With the ending of existence, there is the ending of birth.’

**18.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is not, does existence not occur?  
With the ending of what, is there the ending of existence?’

**18.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is no clinging, existence does not occur;  
With the ending of clinging, there is the ending of existence.’

**19.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is not, does clinging not occur?  
With the ending of what, is there the ending of clinging?’

**19.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is no craving, clinging does not occur;  
With the ending of craving, there is the ending of clinging.’

**20.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is not, does craving not occur?  
With the ending of what, is there the ending of craving?’

**20.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is no feeling, craving does not occur;  
With the ending of feeling, there is the ending of craving.’

**21.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is not, does feeling not occur?  
With the ending of what, is there the ending of feeling?’

**21.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is no contact, feeling does not occur;  
With the ending of contact, there is the ending of feeling.’

**22.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is not, does contact not occur?  
With the ending of what, is there the ending of contact?’

**22.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is no sixfold sense-base, contact does not occur;  
With the ending of the sixfold sense-base, there is the ending of contact.’

**23.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is not, does the sixfold sense-base not occur?  
With the ending of what, is there the ending of the sixfold sense-base?’

**23.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
‘When there is no name-and-form, the sixfold sense-base does not occur;  
With the ending of name-and-form, there is the ending of the sixfold sense-base.’

## The ending of suffering

**24.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
‘Now when what is not, does name-and-form not occur?  
With the ending of what, is there the ending of name-and-form?’

**24.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
 ‘When there is no consciousness, name-and-form does not occur;  
 With the ending of consciousness, there is the ending of name-and-form.’

**25.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
 ‘Now when what is not, does consciousness not occur?  
 With the ending of what, is there the ending of consciousness?’

**25.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there was in me penetration into wisdom thus:  
 ‘When there is no name-and-form, consciousness does not occur;  
 With the ending of formations, there is the ending of consciousness.’

**26.1** Now when what is not, do formations not occur?<sup>19</sup>  
 With the ending of what, is there the ending of formations?’

**26.2** Then, bhikshus, through wise attention, there arose in me penetration into reality thus:  
 ‘When there is no ignorance, formations do not occur;  
 With the ending of ignorance, there is the ending of formations.’

### The 12-link ending of suffering

**27** Thus there is this:  
 With the ending of ignorance, there is the ending of formations.  
 With the ending of formations, there is the ending of consciousness.  
 With the ending of consciousness, there is the ending of name-and-form.  
 With the ending of name-and-form, there is the ending of the sixfold sense-base.  
 With the ending of the sixfold sense-base, there is the ending of contact.  
 With the ending of contact, there is the ending of feeling.  
 With the ending of feeling, there is the ending of craving.  
 With the ending of craving, there is the ending of clinging.  
 With the ending of clinging, there is the ending of existence.  
 With the ending of existence, there is the ending of birth.  
 With the ending of birth, there is the ending of decay-and-death:  
 Sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and distress end.  
 Thus there is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.

**28.1** Then, bhikshus, this occurred to me:  
 ‘I have indeed found this path of awakening, namely:  
 With the ending of name-and-form, there is the ending of consciousness.  
 With the ending of consciousness, there is the ending of name-and-form.  
 With the ending of name-and-form, there is the ending of the sixfold sense-base.  
 With the ending of the sixfold sense-base, there is the ending of contact.  
 With the ending of contact, there is the ending of feeling.  
 With the ending of feeling, there is the ending of craving.  
 With the ending of craving, there is the ending of clinging.  
 With the ending of clinging, there is the ending of existence.  
 With the ending of existence, there is the ending of birth.  
 With the ending of birth, there is the ending of decay-and-death:  
 Sorrow, lamentation, physical pain, mental pain, and distress end.  
 Thus there is the ending of this whole mass of suffering.’

<sup>19</sup> These 2 sections (§§26.1-2) are not found in **Nagara S** (S 12.65) which goes on with the looped dependent ending of suffering.

**28.2** ‘**The ending! The ending!**’ thus, bhikshus, it occurred to me. In things unheard before, the eye arose in me, knowledge arose, wisdom arose, true knowledge arose, light arose.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> After this, **Nagara S** (S 12.65) continues with the parable of the city and the rest (§§5.28-40).